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ABSTRACT

This brief paper summarizes information collected from state education agencies concerning: (1) state-level special education data collected by gender; and (2) gender and special education issues identified as concerns. A section on the study's background notes that about two-thirds of students receiving special education services are boys, especially in the areas of emotional disturbance and specific learning disability. Three theories to explain these gender differences are noted. A survey completed by 42 state and 3 non-state school jurisdictions found 41 jurisdictions collected gender information for at least one type of special education data, most commonly disability category, educational environment, and state-wide assessment participation. Twenty-seven jurisdictions identified one or more gender and special education issues as a concern, of which the most common were special education identification overall, disciplinary actions, specific disability categories, and educational environments. However, few (10) indicated a need or interest in receiving technical assistance on gender and special education. The paper concludes by recommending that states be required to report child count data by gender as well as race/ethnicity. A table details the special education data collected by gender for each state. (Contains 10 references.) (DB)

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Gender and Special Education: Current State-Data Collection Quick Turn Around

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January 2003

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Quick Turn Around

Project FORUM

QTA – A brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Gender and Special Education: Current State Data Collection

January 2003

by Jennifer Tschantz and Joy Markowitz

Purpose

This *Quick Turn Around (QTA)* summarizes information collected from state education agencies (SEAs) by Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) in the following areas: (a) state-level special education data collected by gender and (b) gender and special education issues identified as concerns. This activity was conducted as part of Project FORUM's Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Background

The topic of gender and special education has recently received increased attention by both researchers and the popular press (Coutinho, Oswald, & King, 2001; Oswald, Nuygen, Coutinho, & Hull, 2000; Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001; Skertic & Rossi, 2002; Vaishnav, 2002; Vaishnav & Dedman, 2002). Also, gender issues have been examined in regard to racial/ethnic disproportionality in special education (Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002). However, the knowledge base on gender and special education remains relatively limited.

Approximately two-thirds of the students receiving special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are boys (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The disproportional representation of boys to girls is most striking in the areas of emotional disturbance and specific learning disability. Some data suggest, however, that the gender ratio may vary from school district to school district (Vaishnav & Dedman, 2002).

Three theories, referred to as the "three B's" by Coutinho, Oswald and King (2001), have emerged to explain the gender differences for special education identification rates:

- biological differences between girls and boys;
- behavioral differences between girls and boys; and
- bias in special education referral and assessment procedures.

These three theories are also discussed in Section II of the Twentieth Annual Report to Congress (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, pp. 27-30).

Thus far, researchers have not found a clear explanation for the causes of gender differences in special education identification (Coutinho, Oswald, & King, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Additionally, we do not know if boys are over-represented and/or if girls are under-represented, or if some gender disparities are appropriate (Coutinho, Oswald, & King, 2001; Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001). More research is needed on the aforementioned

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topics as well as on special education gender differences in the following areas: type and amount of services; educational achievement and outcomes; and within and across racial/ethnic subgroups.

SEAs are a potential source of data on gender and special education. But while the IDEA mandates that special education child count data be collected by race/ethnicity [20 U.S.C. §1418(a)], there currently is no special education data-reporting requirement for gender. However, many SEAs collect and use this information. The survey results reported in this document represent the current status of SEA special education data collection by gender.

Survey

Project FORUM developed a survey to gather information from SEAs on gender and special education in collaboration with Project PROGRESS,[1] an OSEP funded project investigating the relationship between gender and educational and vocational outcomes for students with disabilities. The survey was sent to all SEAs in July 2002.

SEAs were asked whether or not the following 12 types of special education data are collected by gender at the state level: (a) age of referral; (b) disability category; (c) educational environment or placement; (d) type or amount of services provided; (e) state-wide assessment participation; (f) state-wide assessment results; (g) suspensions and expulsions; (h) placement in interim alternative education settings (IAES); (i) dropout rate; (j) graduation rate; (k) post-secondary employment; and (l) post-secondary education and training. SEAs that reported collecting special education data by gender were asked how this information is used. Response choices were: program improvement; monitoring; self-assessment; reporting to the public; identifying professional development needs; reporting to the State Board of Education; responding to inquiries from stakeholders; and other.

SEAs were requested to indicate whether or not specific gender and special education issues are a concern in their states, including gender disproportion in the following areas:

- identification for special education;
- identification for gifted programs;
- specific disability categories;
- educational environment;
- amount or type of educational services;
- disciplinary actions;
- state-wide assessments;
- school completion;
- post-secondary outcomes; and
- other issues.

SEAs were further asked whether or not they have a need or interest in technical assistance on this topic, if any general education data are collected by gender at the state level and if any one-time study or data collection had been conducted on the topic of gender and education.

Forty-two states and three non-state jurisdictions completed the survey for a total of 45 responses. The data collected from these 45 SEAs are summarized in the remainder of this document.

[1] For more information on Project PROGRESS (Predicting Outcomes by Gender and Exceptionality Status) visit their website at http://views.vcu.edu/~progress/Home.htm

Findings

State Special Education Data Collected By Gender

Forty-one of the 45 responding SEAs collect gender information for at least one type of special education data. Most of these (32 SEAs) collect gender information on seven or more types of special education data. The most common data collected by gender are: disability category (38 SEAs); educational environment (36 SEAs); state-wide assessment participation (35 SEAs); state-wide assessment results (35 SEAs); graduation rate (34 SEAs); dropout rate (33 SEAs); suspensions and expulsions (30 SEAs); and type or amount of services provided (24 SEAs). Less common data collected by gender are: age of referral (8 SEAs); post-secondary employment (10 SEAs); post-secondary education and training (10 SEAs); and placement in IAES (20 SEAs). This information is presented by state in Table 1.

Respondents from three of the SEAs that collect special education data by gender elaborated on their responses—two indicated that they plan to collect additional types of special education data by gender in the coming year and one stated that for age of referral and type of service provided, gender information is collected for Part C only (services for infants and toddlers).

Use of State Special Education Data Collected by Gender

Of the 41 SEAs that collect at least one type of special education data by gender, all but one reported current use of this information. The remaining SEA plans to use these data in the future.

The number of uses reported by SEAs varied, ranging from one to seven (out of eight items). For example, eight SEAs reported only one use of special education data collected by gender, and another eight reported seven uses. Most of the SEAs (34) use gender and special education information to respond to inquiries from stakeholders. The other most common uses are: program improvement (24 SEAs); monitoring (23 SEAs); reporting to the public (23 SEAs); self-assessment (22 SEAs); and reporting to the state board of education (20 SEAs).

State Gender and Special Education Concerns

Twenty-seven of the 45 responding SEAs identified one or more gender and special education issues as a concern in their state. Thirteen SEAs identified 7-9 concerns; seven SEAs identified 4-6 concerns; and another seven identified 1-3 concerns. The most commonly reported concerns were gender disproportionality in regard to:

- special education identification overall (23 SEAs);
- disciplinary actions (21 SEAs);
- specific disability categories (21 SEAs); and
- educational environments (19 SEAs).

Less commonly reported concerns were gender disproportionality in regard to:

- state-wide assessment participation and/or results (15 SEAs);
- school completion (15 SEAs);
- amount or type of services (14 SEAs);
- post-secondary outcomes (11 SEAs); and
- identification for gifted programs (10 SEAs).

Eighteen of the responding SEAs did not identify any gender and special education concerns. Four of the 18 were the SEAs that do not collect gender data. Another four indicated that they had not studied gender and special education issues or had not systematically analyzed their data to determine whether or not they had concerns. An additional four simply stated that no concerns had been identified. One SEA stated that the state Office for Civil Rights handles any cases of discrimination based on gender. The remaining five did not elaborate on why gender and special education issues are not a concern.

State Need or Interest in Technical Assistance

Relatively few SEAs (10) indicated a need or interest in receiving technical assistance on the topic of gender and special education. Respondents from three of these SEAs specifically stated they want to learn more about available technology to assist in data collection and/or analysis. Three other SEA respondents reported an interest in general information on the topic, including studies conducted on gender and special education and useful strategies to address concerns.

State General Education Data Collected By Gender

Forty of the 45 responding SEAs reported that some state-level general education data are collected by gender. Of the remaining five, two respondents stated they do not know whether any general education data are collected by gender, two reported general education data are not collected by gender and one reported gender data are available at the school building level only.

Most of the 40 SEAs provided examples of the type of state-level general education data collected by gender; however, this information was not specifically requested and therefore cannot be considered complete. The most common responses included: statewide assessment participation and results (15 SEAs), school completion (9 SEAs), school enrollment (8 SEAs), and suspensions and expulsions (7 SEAs). For each of the following types of data, two SEAs reported collection by gender: dominant language, post-secondary outcomes, course enrollment, and demographic information (not specified). Twelve SEAs reported that all general education data are collected by gender, but did not specify the types of data.

One-time Study on Gender and Special Education

Only five SEAs indicated that a one-time study or data collection had been conducted in their state on the topic of gender and special education. Two of these sent copies of formal reports. In 1996, Minnesota conducted a study of two local districts in order to explore their 4-to-1 gender ratio (boys to girls) in programs for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. The SEA found that the girls in these programs were more severely impaired than their male counterparts on a number of different measures (Ryan, 1996). In 1992, Wisconsin examined its gender disparities in emotional disturbances and learning disabilities and reviewed the gender and special education knowledge base (Harmon, Stockton, & Contrucci, 1992). The SEA found that gender disparities were in part due to errors in special education referral and assessment procedures. The report outlined recommendations to reduce these errors.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Although SEAs are not required to collect special education data by gender, a majority do and most of these collect several types of special education data by gender. SEAs vary somewhat on how they use gender information; most commonly the information is used to respond to inquires from stakeholders. Twenty-seven of the participating SEAs identified at least one gender and special education issue as a concern, but only 10 were interested in technical assistance on the topic.

Given the gender disparity in special education identification rates, researchers with Project PROGRESS have suggested that states be required to report child count data by gender in addition to race/ethnicity (Coutinho, Oswald, & King, 2001). Findings from Project FORUM's survey suggest that adding this requirement would not be a substantial burden for many SEAs. Such information would provide useful national-level gender and special education data on: disability category, educational environment, discipline, school completion as well as gender differences within and across racial/ethnic subgroups.

More research on gender and special education is needed since the causes of gender disparities remain unclear. Specifically, researchers should consider exploring the most common gender disproportionality issues identified as concerns by SEAs in this survey: identification for special education, disciplinary actions, specific disability categories and educational placement. Additionally, given the gender differences in special education identification rates across racial/ethnic groups, particularly the disproportionately high number of African American boys identified in some disability categories, the influence of both race/ethnicity and gender is a critical area for future special education research efforts (Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002).

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Table 1
State Special Education Data Collected by Gender
(N = 45 survey respondents)

State	Age of referral	Disability category	Educ enviro	Type/ amt of serv	State assess partic	State assess result	Suspe &/or expul	IAES place-ment	Drop out rate	Gradu-ation rate	Post-second employ	Post-second educ
AK	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
AL		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
AR		✓	✓									
BIA					✓	✓						
CA		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
CO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
CT		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
DE		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
DODEA		✓		✓	✓	✓				✓		
FL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GU												
HI		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
IA		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
ID		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
KS	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		
KY		✓	*				*		*	*		
LA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
MA		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		*	*		
MD		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ME		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
MI		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
MN		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
MO		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
MS		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
MT		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
NC		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓			
NE		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ND		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
NH	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		
NM		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓		
NV												
NY					✓	✓			✓	✓		
OH		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
OR		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
RI		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
SC		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
SD												
TN					✓	✓						
UT		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
VT		✓	✓			✓						
WI		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WV												
WY		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Total	**8**	**38**	**36**	**24**	**35**	**35**	**30**	**20**	**33**	**34**	**10**	**10**

*Beginning in 2002-2003.

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